

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama Sets Funding Help for First New Nuclear Plant in Decades

By VOA News

U.S. President Barack Obama says the government will guarantee more than \$8 billion in loans to help build the first new American nuclear power plant in decades. The project is expected to produce roughly 4000 new jobs.

The president says clean, safe nuclear power is vital to the nation's future. "To meet our growing energy needs and prevent the worst consequences of climate change, we will need to increase our supply of nuclear power. It is that simple," he said.

He says the government is getting involved by guaranteeing loans to meet the high costs of nuclear plant construction — starting with \$8.3 billion to help fund the new plant in the state of Georgia. "This one plant, for example, will cut carbon pollution by 16 million tons each year when compared to a similar coal plant. That is like taking 3.5 million cars off the road," said Mr. Obama.

But the president stresses the project in Georgia will do more than provide electricity for over one million people. "It is a plant that will create thousands of construction jobs in the next few years, and some 800 permanent jobs — well-paying permanent jobs — in the years to come," he said.

The president made the announcement while visiting a job training center run by a union representing electricians and telecommunications workers near Washington. The center teaches a variety of high-tech skills, including those needed for the construction of nuclear power plants.

Sensitive to nationwide concerns about the stubbornly high unemployment rate, the president stressed the link between the economy and boosting alternative sources of energy. He warned the United States is already lagging behind other countries in building nuclear power plants — citing heavy investments in Japan, France and elsewhere.

"There are 56 nuclear reactors under construction around the world: 21 in China alone; six in South Korea and five in India," said the president.

Mr. Obama acknowledged that there are opinion differences in America on the use of nuclear power. He stressed the nation cannot continue to be mired in the old debates between right and left, and between environmentalists and entrepreneurs.

"The fact is, changing the ways we produce and use

energy requires us to think anew, it requires us to act anew, and it demands of us a willingness to extend our hand across some of the old divides," he said.

No new plants have been built in the United States in almost three decades, in large part because of the high cost of construction and lingering concerns about safety. Nuclear plants currently provide about one-fifth of the nation's electricity.

Statement by Secretary Clinton on Lunar New Year

Clinton sends warm wishes to those who celebrate Lunar New Year

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Office of the Spokesman

February 14, 2010

STATEMENT BY SECRETARY CLINTON

Lunar New Year

On behalf of the American people, I offer warm wishes for peace, prosperity, and health to everyone around the world celebrating the Lunar New Year. People on every continent will mark this occasion with rich and varied traditions, ushering in a new year of promise and possibility. In the United States, millions of Asian-Americans will gather with friends and family to welcome the Year of the Tiger and honor their vibrant heritage. This is an opportunity to reaffirm the bonds of mutual respect and mutual interest that unite us across borders and cultures, and recommit to working together to ensure the year ahead brings progress on the many shared challenges we face.

Concern Grows over Potential for Middle Eastern Nuclear Arms Race

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.

Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton wrapped up a three-day Gulf diplomatic mission after consultations with key Middle Eastern leaders in Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference as well as with regional business leaders and college students.

Clinton told Saudi college students February 16 that the long-term goal of the United States is to see the entire Middle East, including Iran, free of nuclear weapons. Her speech echoed a theme set by President Obama in a speech in April 2009 in Prague in which he called for a future time when the world would be nuclear free. It is a sweeping foreign policy goal he set in talks with his Russian counterpart, President Dmitry Medvedev, in several meetings in London and Moscow, and is a theme

for which he was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 2009.

"If Iran gets a nuclear weapon, that hope disappears because then other countries which feel threatened by Iran will say to themselves, 'If Iran has a nuclear weapon, I better get one, too, in order to protect my people,'" Clinton said. "Then you have a nuclear arms race in the region."

"Everyone who I speak with in the Gulf, including the leaders here and leaders elsewhere in the region, are expressing deep concern about Iran's intentions," Clinton added in a speech at the all-women Dar al-Hekma College in Jeddah.

Clinton began her trip in Qatar February 14 with a speech before the U.S.-Islamic World Forum in Doha, followed by an engagement with students in Education City. She continued on to Riyadh and Jeddah in Saudi Arabia.

Between official meetings when she travels, the secretary often holds town hall meetings that involve direct contact with college students. Clinton meets with a wide range of civil society groups, women's groups and students as part of an effort to reach out to those who often don't have direct contact with senior U.S. officials.

Clinton told the Saudi women that the United States has worked to launch a new relationship with Iran based on diplomacy, and has sought to chart a path with Iran for a peaceful nuclear program within international safeguards. "But Iran has refused to reciprocate, and since October has refused every offer to meet with the [international] representatives on its nuclear program," she said at a press conference with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal on February 15 in Riyadh.

While in Jeddah, Clinton met with Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

The United States has been working closely with Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia to convince Iran to abandon its nuclear weapons development program. But Iran has responded to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that it will start producing higher-grade enriched uranium, which Clinton called a "provocative move" in defiance of U.N. Security Council resolutions.

"The Iranian government knows that this risks creating more regional instability and will result in increasing isolation," she said. "You have to ask yourself, 'Why are they doing this?'" Clinton said.

MIDDLE EAST PEACE

At her press conference in Riyadh, Clinton said the

United States and Saudi Arabia share the goal of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. After meeting with Saudi King Abdullah, the secretary said they discussed how best to re-launch what she called "credible and productive negotiations" on the Middle East that will achieve both Palestinian and Israeli hopes.

"The 2002 Arab Peace Initiative is vital to the efforts necessary to promote a comprehensive peace, and it lays out a vision of a better future for all of the region's people," Clinton said. "It is time to renew its spirit today and to move toward specifics."

The United States is convinced that in "good-faith negotiations" the Israelis and Palestinians can agree on an outcome that ends the ongoing conflict and reconciles the Palestinian goal of an independent state based on the 1967 lines with the Israeli goal of a Jewish state with secure and recognized borders that meet Israeli concerns, Clinton said.

While encouraging negotiations, Clinton said, the international community must also support Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and the Palestinian Authority to build a viable economy and state institutions necessary for a working and independent government that provides security, rule of law and essential services to the Palestinian people.

To underscore the U.S. efforts in the Middle East, deputy secretaries of state James Steinberg and Jacob Lew are being sent to the region for further consultations across a range of issues including the stalled Middle East peace process and Iran's inadequate response to efforts to halt its nuclear development program.

Lew is slated to visit Egypt, Israel and Jordan beginning February 20, and Steinberg is traveling to Israel during the week of February 21. In addition, William Burns, the under secretary of state for political affairs, is traveling to Lebanon February 16, Syria February 17 and Turkey on February 18, and concludes his travel in Azerbaijan on February 19.

During the week of March 8, Vice President Biden and his wife, Jill Biden, will travel to Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt and Jordan for consultations on a full range of bilateral and regional issues, the White House announced. Vice President Biden will meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Palestinian President Abbas, Prime Minister Fayyad, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, and Jordanian King Abdullah II.

U.S., Iraqi Partners Explore Potential of New Media Technologies

Companies encourage cell phone, social networks, other mobile applications

By Howard Cincotta

Special Correspondent

Washington — When officials of several leading U.S. technology companies visited Iraq in April 2009, they discovered that computer Internet access was limited and expensive, but cell phones had become ubiquitous.

Their conclusion: expand the use of these mobile devices and their applications to empower and connect people, launch businesses and make the Iraqi government more accessible and transparent.

The delegation is one element in a broad public-private partnership with Iraq to explore the potential of new information technologies for the country's development.

Following the delegation's trip, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton established the Iraq Technology Task Force — part of a broad set of initiatives called Civil Society 2.0, which uses new Internet and communications technologies to deepen America's engagement with civil society in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East.

"This organized effort will provide new technologies to civil society organizations," Secretary Clinton said at the Forum for the Future, held in Marrakech, Morocco, on November 3. "We will send experts in digital technology and communications to help build capacity."

That same month, Eric Schmidt, chief executive officer of the Internet giant Google, met with Iraqi government and university officials as well as computer-science students. He announced new technology initiatives involving the Iraq National Museum and YouTube.

Clinton has also announced a program to place Iraqi interns in U.S. technology firms, where they can learn the skills needed to transform entrepreneurial ideas into business realities.

In January, a first group of six Iraqi interns began 12-week internships with major U.S. information-technology firms.

"The program is huge opportunity to enhance the digital world in Iraq and to open the door for private investment," said Sadeq Shnaishel, who will work as a computer programmer with the telecommunications firm AT&T in St. Louis.

MOBILE EMPOWERMENT

"There were almost no mobile phones a few years ago,

and now there are 10 million users or more," observed Jason Liebman, founder and chief executive officer of Howcast, during the delegation's first visit in April 2009. Howcast produces online instructional videos than can be distributed and shared through mobile devices.

"We heard that only 5 percent of Iraqis have Internet access at their homes. However, mobile phones are nearly ubiquitous," said Richard Robbins, director of social innovation at AT&T.

Along with AT&T and technology experts from Google, the delegation members represented the social networking companies Twitter (mobile messaging service), YouTube (online video sharing), Automattic/Wordpress (blogging), MeetUp (community organization) and Blue State Digital (Internet advocacy), along with Wired magazine, which covers digital technology.

Despite Iraq's limited infrastructure, the U.S. delegation agreed that mobile technologies offer a promising avenue for Iraq's public and private sectors to explore.

"Since coming back from the trip, I'm even more convinced that the combination of empowering individuals through platforms such as blogging and opening up the process of government is ultimately going to have a very positive impact on Iraq," said Raanan Bar-Cohen of Automattic/WordPress.

One of the delegation's first tangible accomplishments was convincing the prime minister of the Kurdistan region, Barham Salih, to join Twitter, where he since has been providing daily updates, or tweets. (Salih's postings can be found at <http://twitter.com/BarhamSalih>.)

"He's making the government a lot more human and approachable," said Jack Dorsey, co-founder of Twitter.

On his November 2009 trip to Iraq, Google's Schmidt told his audiences that when individuals connect an institution like an urban university — with thousands of students, classrooms and coffee shops — they create a self-perpetuating "virtuous cycle."

The cycle can begin when someone starts a business using readily available Internet tools, Schmidt said, and is perpetuated when others join as the benefits become apparent.

SOCIAL NETWORKS

The same pattern holds for networks that form around shared interests in communities, culture, social issues or politics.

Effective use of new media tools can be as simple as searching Facebook or another social networking site by issue, country or mutual interest. People then begin inviting one another to join online groups, use live chat or share videos and information.

Facebook and Twitter were begun as sites for social and personal interaction. Today, however, these networks — whether interactive Web sites, online blogs, or cell phone texting — are empowering youth and citizen groups around the world in unexpected and powerful ways.

Howcast.com, for example, offers short videos on such topics as arranging flowers, cooking an omelet or doing the moonwalk dance step. But you can also learn how to use new media to organize a civic group online, hold a virtual town meeting or raise funds for a cause using mobile phones and the Internet.

Two riveting examples of the impact of mobile technology and social networks are the recent political protests in Iran and Moldova, which were largely organized and coordinated using basic tools including cell phones, Facebook and Twitter.

New media can contribute in less dramatic ways as well. On his personal blog, Bar-Cohen said Iraq has thousands of highly educated computer students with limited job prospects, many of whom are waiting and hoping to land government jobs.

Instead, he suggested, they could work with open-source Internet applications, blog online, and begin “to make a name for themselves.” Then, they could start bidding for the thousands of online projects looking for contractors whose physical location is unimportant.

MUSEUMS AND YOUTUBE

In Iraq, Schmidt announced the launch of a Google project to create digital images of more than 14,000 artifacts from the Iraq National Museum in Baghdad. The result will be an electronic catalog where objects in the museum’s unparalleled Mesopotamian collections can be viewed online from different angles and resolutions.

Google also partnered with the government in launching the first official Iraqi YouTube channel, designed to create more openness and help connect the government to its citizens. (The Web site is www.youtube.com/Iraqigov.)

“We’ll discover even more what’s great about Iraq, this new country being built, the resurgence of a new society,” Schmidt said in a YouTube message.

Liebman of Howcast sees a world of opportunity for Iraq, like other developing countries, in using mobile

technologies for such activities as teaching classes, banking and making electronic salary payments to reduce corruption.

“This is definitely a country with a thirst for information and information sharing — and mobile will be a key for so many of the things the Iraqi people want to do,” he said.

First U.S. Science Envoys Begin Work in Muslim-Majority Countries

American scientists seek new partnerships to address global challenges

By Cheryl Pellerin
Science Writer

Washington — At a time when many of the critical challenges that nations face are global in nature, three American scientists are setting out on separate journeys to Muslim-majority countries to strengthen and forge new partnerships in science, medicine, engineering and technology.

They are part of a new Science Envoy program that President Obama announced in a June 4, 2009, speech at Cairo University, where he also called for a “new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world.”

The first envoys — Ahmed Zewail, Elias Zerhouni and Bruce Alberts — will visit Muslim-majority countries from North Africa to Southeast Asia from January through May. Future science envoys will travel to other regions as the program expands.

“On science and technology,” Obama told the students in Cairo, “we will launch a new fund to support technological development in Muslim-majority countries and to help transfer ideas to the marketplace so they can create jobs. We will open centers of scientific excellence in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia and appoint new science envoys to collaborate on programs that develop new sources of energy, create green jobs, digitize records, clean water, grow new crops.”

THE ENVOYS

Ahmed Zewail is a professor of chemistry and of physics and director of the Center for Physical Biology at the California Institute of Technology. He received the 1999 Nobel Prize in chemistry for his pioneering developments in femtosience (observing the movement of individual atoms in a femtosecond, or one quadrillionth of a second), which allowed him to study atoms and molecules in motion to see what actually happens when chemical bonds break and new ones are created.

Zewail began his mission January 10 in Egypt, where he was born and studied at the University of Alexandria, later receiving a doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania in the United States. He will also travel to Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, meeting with heads of state, government officials and representatives from the scientific, education and business communities to seek opportunities for partnerships.

Elias Zerhouni is professor of radiology and of biomedical engineering at Johns Hopkins University in Maryland and a senior fellow in the Global Health program at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. He was director of the U.S. National Institutes of Health from 2002 to 2008. He received his medical degree at the University of Algiers School of Medicine before coming to the United States, and is a member of the board of trustees of the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia.

Beginning in February, Zerhouni was traveling to Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi and Qatar.

Bruce Alberts is a professor emeritus in the University of California-San Francisco Department of Biochemistry and Biophysics. He is editor-in-chief of Science magazine and served two six-year terms as president of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences from 1993 to 2005. From 2000 to 2005, he co-chaired the InterAcademy Council, an advisory institution in Amsterdam governed by the presidents of 15 national science academies.

Alberts will travel to Indonesia in May.

"Although the envoys are private citizens," State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said in a January 11 briefing, "they will share what they learn on these trips with the U.S. government, and the relationships they build will reaffirm our renewed commitment to global engagement."

SCIENCE DIPLOMACY

The first envoys were chosen by the U.S. National Academies of Science with help from the President's Office of Science and Technology Policy and the State Department. They were announced by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in November 2009 in Marrakech, Morocco.

The envoys will investigate opportunities in all areas of science and technology, including mathematics, engineering, health, energy, climate change research and green technologies; identify the strengths of and gaps in scientific institutions; and offer recommendations. Each scientist will carry his own experience and interests into

the mission.

"One of my obvious focus areas as a science envoy, because I've been president of the U.S. National Academy," Alberts said in a January 12 interview, "is to try to help the academies in other countries become powerful entities in their own countries for advising their governments, for bringing the wisdom of science to their people."

Alberts is passionate about science education, especially for young people, and about seeing that people in every country have access to all the benefits science can deliver. He knew almost nothing about international science until becoming president of the National Academy, he said, and attending a "science summit" on world population in New Delhi, India, in October 1993 with representatives of national academies of science throughout the world.

"I went to that meeting and got enticed by a second issue besides science education," Alberts said, "which is the ability of scientists around the world first of all to work together effectively to do more than any one of us can do alone. And secondly, the potential to spread science in new ways that I hadn't even thought of in the United States, to what they call in India 'reach the unreachable' through science."

In the coming months, according to the State Department, other prominent U.S. scientists will be invited to join the U.S. Science Envoy Program, expanding the scope of the program to countries and regions around the globe.

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